

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
SOUTHEAST REGION/ FLORIDA FISH & WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
JOINT NEWS RELEASE**

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**FISHERIES SERVICE OFFERS \$10,000 REWARD IN A NETTING CASE
WHICH CAUSED FOUR GREEN SEA TURTLE DEATHS**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office for Law Enforcement is offering a \$10,000 reward for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of the parties responsible for the deployment of a 70-yard long monofilament gillnet in which four dead endangered green sea turtles were found on October 18 in St. Joe Bay near Panama City, Fla. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is offering an additional reward of \$1,000 through the agency's Wildlife Alert Program, for information that leads to an arrest.

"I discovered the net during a routine patrol of the bay," said FWC Officer Mike Nobles. "I estimate that the net had been in the water for about a week. It contained many marine species in addition to the four green sea turtles including pompano, conch, horseshoe crabs, stone crabs, and spider crabs."

"The use of monofilament gillnets has been illegal since 1994 when voters overwhelmingly approved a net limitation amendment," said Major Kent Thompson of the FWC's Bureau of Marine Enforcement. "So whoever is responsible for deploying that net is subject to prosecution by the state under that law. Furthermore, whoever is responsible for the net also violated the Endangered Species Act, which is under federal jurisdiction."

Breeding populations of green sea turtles off Florida were listed as endangered on July 28, 1978. The greatest cause of decline in green turtle populations is commercial harvest for eggs and food. Other turtle parts are used for leather and jewelry, and small turtles are sometimes stuffed for curios. Incidental catch during fishing operations is a continuing source of mortality that adversely affects their recovery.

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"The green sea turtle's recovery is progressing very slowly, primarily due to human interactions," said Special Agent-in-Charge of NOAA's Southeast Enforcement Division Gene Proulx. "We will use all the resources at our disposal to pursue the person or people responsible for these turtles' deaths. We hope that the reward we're offering entices someone to come forward with the information we need to identify the perpetrators."

Anyone with information about this incident or other netting violations can call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement office, toll free, at (850) 830-8850 or the FWC's Panama City Beach office at (850) 233-5150.

This and other Southeast Regional news releases and fishery bulletins are available on the region's Internet home page: <http://caldera.sero.mms.gov> or NOAA's Internet home page, <http://www.noaa.gov/public-affairs/press2000.html>.

NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The agency conducts scientific research and provides services and products to support fisheries management, fisheries development, trade, and industry assistance, enforcement, and protected species and habitat conservation programs.

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